

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF THE ABUSED ELDERLY

Joel Rey U. Acob*

Faculty of Nursing, Visayas State University, Philippines

Accepted: 18 March 2018

***Correspondence:**

Joel Rey U. Acob
Faculty of Nursing, Visayas State University
Visca, Baybay City, Leyte Philippines
Email: joel.acob@vsu.edu.ph
Cell +639173045312

Copyright: © the author(s), YCAB publisher and Public Health of Indonesia. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License, which permits unrestricted non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

ABSTRACT

Aim: The study determined individual lived experiences of the abused elderly in the provinces of Leyte and Biliran.

Methods: The study utilized qualitative phenomenology. Interviews are made and recorded, then later transcribed verbatim. Collaizi's method is used as method of analysis to obtain themes of the lived experiences of the ten abused key informants.

Results: Based from results, most of the abused entities are female, widowed aging 60 to 65 years old, earning less than 2000 pesos per month and are dependently living in a nuclear family structure for 40 years. Based on their responses to the open-ended guide questions, key informants revealed emotional mistreatment being the most extensive type of abuse. Physical and sexual maltreatment are also evident amidst their old age. Family members and employers are the main identified perpetrators of the elderly. Bruises on most covered areas in their body, rope burns, torn undergarments, being touched without consent are some of the objective indicators of abuse. Themes such as family violence and workplace mistreatment are the most common form of abuse experienced.

Conclusion: Based from the findings, it is recommended that the local government and concerned stakeholders to timely review existing rules protecting vulnerable adults especially its implementation.

Keywords: elderly abuse, elderly care, lived experiences, abused elderly

BACKGROUND

Elder abuse is a growing concern since the number of elder population is increasing in most countries ([Litwin, 2004](#)). In 2005, the United States has 34.8 million (12.1%) of the population aging 65 years and over. In the Philippines as of July 2012, the elderly population aging 65 years and above already reached 4.2%. It is estimated by the Adult Protective Services that 10% of adults over age of 65 have been victims of abuse and neglect. The incidence of domestic elder abuse increased to 150% between 1986 to 1996. In 1996, it was reported that almost 551,000 people over age 60 were abused, neglected and

suffered maltreatment; approximately four times as many incidents were not reported ([APS, 2010](#)).

The increased number of elderly has been accompanied by an increase abuse. In 2000, the Adult Protective Services (APS) received 472,813 reports of elder and vulnerable adult abused nationally. In 2004, APS recorded 19.7% increase from 2000 survey. It has been estimated that approximately 2 million older adults are abused and neglected yearly, yet full extent of abuse is not known because many cases are not recognized by health care

providers ([Harrel, 2002](#)). Further, Litwin ([2004](#)) mentioned that this is the major reason why elder abuse and mistreatment is not recognized. It is believed that only one in every five cases is reported ([Harrel, 2002](#)).

The lack of recognition of elder abuse is due to poor education and assessment techniques, the misinterpretation of data as signs of many chronic medical conditions found in older adults and misinterpretation of findings as normal age-related changes ([McNeill, 2004](#)). Other reasons include the older person's isolation in the community and lack of cognitive abilities to verbalize report and to seek help ([McCann & German, 2002](#)). Other victims do not account occurrences of abuse because of fear of retaliation, shame or desire or need to protect the abuser ([Fillet, 1998](#)). Whenever abuse or neglect occur, victims tend to suffer silently, believing that if they tell anyone, unpleasant consequences will transpire such as losing the care they depend on and they will feel ashamed and embarrassed ([Zukerman, 2003](#)).

Another reason for the difficulty detecting abuse case is the lack of standardization in reporting. In a study that surveyed reports of abuse to APS in the United States, it was indicated that approximately 52% of the states did not maintain central abuse registry and only 39% of the states reported maintaining registries of the abusers.

All these encumbrances urged the researcher to engage in interests. With the population growth of older adults, it is expected that nurses will see an increase in elder mistreatment cases and an increase in the number of substantiated mistreatment reports.

The study is aimed to determine the demographic profile of the key informants in terms of age, gender civil status, income, the type of family structure and the number of years living with the family. Second, the study aspired to explore the lived experiences of the abused elderly.

METHODS

Research design

The study utilized Phenomenology design and used qualitative approach. It sought to explore the lived experiences of the abused elderly. Qualitative approach was used to gain insights into the informant's attitudes, behaviors, value system culture and lifestyles. It was used to policy formation and continuing research. In-depth interviews, content analysis and evaluation were among the many formal approaches that were in the study. This qualitative research also involved the analysis of the unstructured material, including reviews of written literature, client feedback and reports.

Research environment

The study was conducted to two locals of Biliran, Biliran and Ormoc, Leyte. Ormoc is a port city and is the largest city by land area in Leyte, and second in Eastern Visayas. Its economic base is a mixture of agriculture, industry, tourism and commercial services. Sugar cane, rice and pineapple are the bulk produce of agricultural sector. The people of Ormoc are predominantly Cebuano-speaking together with the whole western part of Leyte Island. The people relate more to neighboring towns in Cebu than in Eastern Leyte itself. Like most Filipinos, Ormocans being predominantly Roman Catholic celebrates their feast every June.

The island of Biliran was first called *Isla de Panamao* referring to an ethnic fishing net. The name was changed to Biliran, which was derived from a native grass "*borobiliran*". On April 1959, RA 2141 made Biliran a sub-province of Leyte with the title Lt. Governor. On June 1969, RA 5977 was enacted to amend the original charter with the executive power of a provincial governor. The province has a total land area of 555.5 sq. km. with eight municipalities. NSO revealed that for the last 22 years since 2010, its population reached 101,000 with more than half of which are females. This municipality has labor force participation rate of 68%, dominantly men. It also has establishments for business and

leisure. Biliranons have their means of transportation like passenger ferries, cargo ships and shuttle vans in coming over the place.

Research respondents

Through purposive sampling, key informants were determined. Ten (10) key informants of this study were the elderly persons aging 60 years old and above, either male or female. They ought to give consent as participants to the conduct of the study.

Research instruments

There were two parts of the research tools utilized in this work. The first part was the demographic profile which includes age, gender, civil status, income, type of family structure and the number of years living with the family. It served as introductory part of the researcher to guide in formulating follow-up questions based on the basin information and answers retrieved from the informant.

The second part was the semi-structured, open-ended interview guide questions. It has three open-ended questions designed to extort information. The first question actually, was to recognize the present state of the informants, and how were they feeling. Through friendly and respectful approach, it aimed to establish trusting relationship between the informant and the researcher. The second query was to ask them if they're abused or not. But prior to that question, the researcher made the effort to explain the five identified types of abuse to better understand each category and nature. The third question being asked was to let the informant think and remember their experiences that contributed to the present existence of abuse. The researcher incorporated follow-up inquiries to augment and refines information from the subjects and that were based from informant's answers.

Data gathering

First, was the recognition of the possible research informant. Since the subjects were hard to determine, the researcher inquired to the office of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to scan files with

the hope of easier identification. However, the agency doesn't have any files at hand. The researcher sought information from the Senior Citizen's Affairs Office and arrived at the same previous findings. The researcher decided to visit Women's Desk of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and got a positive feedback. A ten-day waiting period was given by the agency to process the request. After the long procedure of screening, respondents were named. The author started to visit the respective places where the respondent lived.

Secondly, the researcher negotiated in terms of transmittal letters to the barangay captain informing the author's purpose of invading their jurisdiction to conduct the study. The barangay captain supported the researcher through sending invitational notices to the identified respondents informing them about the researcher's intention. After sometime, the respective informants allowed the author's objectives by affixing signatures on the consent form as well, and set the date of informant's availability to start the two to three-day author's immersion at the informant's residence.

The researcher being a transient visitor, also performed household chores like fetching water from the river just to win trust, and as part of rapport establishment. During siesta, the author usually started the interview process through recorded-audio equipment.

Treatment of data

To determine profile of the informants, the researcher utilized simple percentage. Collaizi method was also used to provide rich descriptions of the essential structure of the phenomenon ([Colaizzi, 1978](#); [Gunawan, 2015](#)). The interview was transcribed verbatim from audiotapes. The informants' verbalizations were transcribed individually and corresponding codes like numbers were systematically assigned in each phrase. Since the verbalizations were expressed vernacularly by the informants, the researcher adopted the translation back translation method from Vernacular to English then back to vernacular.

Experts both in terms of the Cebuano, Waraynon and English were hired to do the translation part of the data validation.

Since the study claimed for confidentiality, the author assigned respective pseudonyms for the ten informants. The first letter "A" was assigned for first informant, "B" for the second and so as spoke the same thing until the last informant.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Informants

Age

Four out of ten respondents age 60 to 65 years old (40%) revealed that they are abused. Abused elderly aging 66 to 70 years reached (20%) from the total informants, same as through with 76 to 80 years of age. Older adult aging 71 to 75 and 81-85 have the same percentage distribution of (10%) respectively. This opposed the study of the Screening and Intervention in Elder Abuse by Utley in 1999 that the age of abused elderly is from 80 years old and above. It appeared therefore that elderly abuse is present and that it must be keenly monitored by concerned agencies because the age bracket tapered. The age difference of 15 years from that of Utley proposes the thought that elder abuse now begins even at the early elderhood years (Utley, 1999). This occurred because majority of the elderly in the Philippines set-up unlike in the USA are dependent to their siblings this time. As early as 60 years old, these people are now facing sudden changes in their lives such as retirement whether from that of private or public firms. Also their physiologic changes and manifestations of being an elderly adult start to appear, thus decreasing their potentials to live on their own. Their work pacing noticeably changed leading to time-manipulation and act-domination from their siblings and other members of the family.

Gender, Civil Status and Income

Based from the presented data, all of the respondents being abused are females. This

supported the previous study findings of Utley (1999) as cited by (Ebersole, Hess, Touhy, & Jett, 2005b) that most of the abused elderly are female. The result also agreed the datum presented by (Linton, Lach, Matteson, & McConnell, 2007) stating that the majority of the elder abuse victims are female.

One of the reason could be that elderly women are more prone to be abused than men because they are often more economically dependent on others than elderly men. Men with the age of 60 years and above are less likely to live in a single-person household than women of that age because they're afraid that no one will care and look after them, unlike women that they are more adjusted to live alone oftentimes.

Undoubtedly, most of the key informants being abused are widow having (70%) of the total informants. Meanwhile, married elders were abused too with (30%). The emphasis made by most of the key informants should also be noted that they earned less than Php 2000 per month (60%); half of these informants received less than Php 1000. There were two informants (20%) whose income ranges from Php 3000 to 4,000 monthly.

As an offshoot of those enumerated figures, I strongly agree the facts accessed by (Linton et al., 2007) that the highest group of adults experiencing poverty is those 65 years old, female and divorced and or widowed. The integers implied that the elderly are truly dependent from their caregivers. It goes to show the idea that elderly abuse is obvious; however no one dares to report the incidence because of dominating inaction, fear of retaliation from their caregivers.

Type of family structure and number of years staying with the family

Seventy percent (70%) of the informants have a nuclear type of family, while (30%) were noted to be living under the extended family structure. The data sustained the account of the National elder Abuse Incidence Study that most of the elder abuse and neglect cases take place at home (ACL, 1998). The nuclear family according to Murdock typically consists

of a married man and woman with their offspring ([Murdock, 1949](#)). The logic would lead us in saying that the abusers are the great majority living under the same roof of the abused elder. These are spouses, children, and caregivers in some manner.

In this point of view, it is apparent that the occurrence of abuse is undocumented and unreported as what the previous literature and writings from National Elder Abuse Incidence Study were claiming ([ACL, 1998](#)). Because no one bothers to report it, in order to protect the elderly from shame and reprisal.

The extended form of Filipino family includes wide range of relatives from both husband's and wife's side as mentioned by ([T Castillo, Weisblat, & Villareal, 1968](#)). It is safe to say that our and living of being a family-oriented individual coated the real scenario of abuse occurrence in the Philippine set up. Furthermore, the type of family structure, the idea that happens at home is "private" can be a major factor in keeping an older person locked in an abusive situation. Because of family structure type, those outside of the family who observe or suspect abuse or neglect may fail to intervene because they believe it is a family problem and none of their business, or because they are afraid of misinterpreting a private quarrel. Shame and embarrassment often make it difficult, for older persons to reveal the abuse.

Interestingly, half of the total informants (50%) exposed that they lived for almost 41-50 years. There were (30%) who also said they've been with their respective families from 51 to 60 years in span of time. On the other hand, only (10%) of which settled for 30 to 40 years living together and (10%) stayed with the family for 70 years. Medina properly described the living preferences of the Filipinos in terms of time span when she said that most chose to have an intense emotional experience during their lifetime from birth to death ([Medina, 2001](#)). The family is also concerned in providing continuity of social life. This justifies the reason why elder violence continues to become unreported and

undocumented for it occurs in the family where perpetrators are family members. Another reason would be the growing frailty and dependence of the elderly to others, for companionship and for meeting basic needs which hinders abuse reporting.

Lived experiences of the Abused Elderly Family violence

Financial abuse

Key informants experienced being financially abused by her children. It happened within the house. It can be inferred that based on her experience, financial abuse is a form of family violence. According to the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study, most of the incidents of elder abuse don't happen in a nursing home; rather abuse and neglect take place at home. As the dialogue went on, the informant opened her bank book with Php 100 maintaining balance. As she flipped the pages, the researcher found out that the account was named to informant's daughter. The researcher asked why it appeared that way. The 79 year old female informant said that she also don't know, and looked depressed, breathed in so deeply and uttered she's in despair about her children.

This supported the idea of Hess that financial exploitation includes sudden changes in bank account and practices, as well as the inclusion of additional name on an elder's bank signature card ([Ebersole, Hess, Touhy, & Jett, 2005a](#)). It is expounded that financial abuse is also an illegal and improper use of adult's money for another person's profit or advantage such as keeping the adult's pension like what the 77 year adult woman experienced after her daughter exploited her financially for five years most ([National center for elder abuse, 2003](#)). Furthermore, financial exploitation also includes forcing an adult to sell, or give away property or possessions just like in the case of an 82-year old after she was forced by her daughter to apply for loan, for daughter's personal intention and gain.

Another financial abuse experienced by 74 years old for almost 2 years by her house helper. Due to informant's trust, unknowingly,

her helper utilized her right. As Quinn (2002) explained, that during the process, the older adult is made to believe that the abuser cares for the elder and can keep her safe. Quinn added that the older adult is made to feel powerless and totally dependent on the abuser for food, psychological and financial well-being. The adult then forms a strong bond with the abuser and gives financial control of assets to the perpetrator (Quinn).

Physical and Sexual Abuse

The experience of a 64 year old, female informant, with 32 years of being married. In the interview, the informant pointed out that she was sexually violated when her husband wet her undergarment with chili and forcefully wore it. She feels like her perineum was burning, inflamed and painful. While the informant bravely communicated her experience, she covered her mouth to isolate the hum of her cry. Tears were falling as she bowed her head- and there was silence. The researcher observed the informant's hand were trembling and shaking. Few seconds passed, she continued telling her tale.

This supported the theory of Fillet (1998) that abuse is often undetected because of the fear of retaliation, shame or desire to protect the family. It was perceived therefore from the informant's testimony that the cycle of abuse has been illustrated. At first, her husband built tension through threats. The abuse took into pay for so many years but the informant preferred to stay for her children's sake. The victim now has the most control, while the abuser feels remorse. But the cycle repeats itself; the abuser often feels less and less remorse.

The Cleveland Clinic Foundation mentioned that the victims often go through five to seven episodes of abuse before they seek help or leave the relationship. The informant on the other side of the coin cannot remember of any faults committed in the past that made her husband act that way. She continued talking and narrated experiences with her sadist husband, when times where she would force to have sexual intercourse even if she was sick

and myoma. Ebersole noted that sexual abuse includes nonconsensual sexual contact of any kind with an elderly person incapable of giving consent (Ebersole et al., 2005b). The US department of Health and Human Services expounded that sexual abuse is forcing sexual contact or unwanted sexualized behavior.

The informant stressed to have fear and was traumatized with the experiences when one time her hair was pulled since her husband wanted to talk amidst being drunk. It appeared therefore that based from her declaration, she experienced physical abused. The use of force resulting to physical injuries is considered as such. Picariello added that striking, shaking, beating re also forms of physical abuse (Picariello, 1986). The abuse tends to be comfortable lying, having years of practice and so can sound believable when making baseless statements (Bancroft, 1998).

Another informant, widow for three years from Biliran experienced both sexually and physically harassed. It happened when she was on her way home waiting for a vehicle ride. She shared experience that due to her work, being a massage therapist and manicurist, she sometimes went home late. One time she rode on a motorcycle and a motorcycle driver sexually abused her. A sexually abused case in not rampant with only (0.4%) as documented by the National Elder Abuse Incidence Study.

"I rode on a motorcycle with the thought that the driver's intention was good. I never thought that he'll turn the route forth to his house", the informant stated.

As this 63- year old was talking; her voice trembled, and kept on wiping eyes. She behaved like guarding her abdomen, while her other hand gripped her shaking knees. She deep breathed when she uttered, "He drove fast. I was nervous. Due to my fear, I pulled his shirt and asked him where he'll be going".

The key informant made acts to survive and escape from her perceived danger. She jumped off from the running vehicle was positioned

prone to the ground, where her umbrella and bag thrown to afar. She was totally crying that time, until the driver turned back from her post.

It was then recognized by the researcher, that the concerned elderly informant pinched her nose to drive off the nasal fluid and tears as well. The eyes turned red and face flushed. She wiped her eyes and loudly cried. There was a moment of uncommunicativeness as she shed tears. The researcher was bit touched when she said, “he picked me up and thought of letting me stand, but he dragged me to the grass field”. She shouted for help since another motorcycle passed by. But she was unheard by it because her mouth was covered and sealed by the abuser’s hand.

The informant continued narrating, “He perceived we’re still near the road side. He picked me up for the third time and threw me farther. My head bumped into a rock and felt dizzy and weak. My body rolled over and over the cliff.”

“He fixed me. I thought I was dead that time. I shivered because of the cold night. He positioned over my body. I touched my back and I don’t have underwear, he torn it. My leg ached as if fractured. I felt his penis with bullets”.

The abused woman also divulged the conversation and cannot forget the experience. The day after the incident, as she continued reciting, the bystander told her that the perpetrator was a drug addict. The American Psychological Association disclosed that personal problems, substance abuse can contribute to abuse of the elderly ([American Psychiatric Association, 2006](#)).

Emotional Abuse

Emotional or Psychological abuse is the most common type of abuse the researcher noted. Interestingly, this speaks in contrary with the result from US Administration of Aging wherein emotional abuse only ranked fourth

among the five types of abuse (7.3%) ([US administration for aging, 2004](#)).

Undoubtedly, (80%) of all informants claimed they were emotionally harassed. Expressions of being shouted upon, receiving “silent treatment”, feeling threatened, insulted, mentally annoyed, neglected and depressed and often aloof are the common declarations of them. The Philippine constitution obligated the family to care for its elderly members and yet, as observed there was neglect of duty as evidenced by the failure of life necessities such as shelter, food, comfort, personal safety and other essentials ([Ebersole et al., 2005a](#)). The informants were also noticed to have teary eyes, wore untidy and fetid clothing.

Workplace Violence

Another informant from Leyte experienced physical abuse by her employer. During the dialogue with this 67-year old woman, it was learned that the rumored violation was true when she stated that her employer smashed her head unto the cemented road. She collapsed, however fortunate enough when a public school teacher saw her and was rushed to the hospital.

It should be noted from the above statement that there was workplace violence. The US Department of Labor Occupational Safety emphasized that workplace violence is a threat against workers. It can occur at outside the workplace and can range from threats and verbal abuse to physical assaults ([US department of labor occupational safety, 2002](#)).

The informant verbally added that sometimes when her employer do not like the food served, her ears were pinched and seldom kicked. As the informant recited her experience, she exhibited anger, she cried as she contrasted her previous life, to present work with the new employer. Her arms were badly bruised and face abrasion. She went to a doctor for a medical certification and filed complaints to the DSWD, because her Senior citizen card was also taken by her employer too. As far as the old woman is concerned, she can’t

remember any fault committed making her boss mad at.

CONCLUSION

The informants of the study were the identified elderly abused individuals from locales of Biliran and Leyte provinces. Most of the abused entities were females, widow aging 60 to 65 years of age. They received their monthly income of less than two thousand pesos. Mainly they were dependently living with nuclear type of family for more than 40 years and majority of them were cared by their children. Justified that emotional or psychological mistreatment was the most extensive type of abuse unnoticeably existed.

As a piece result of this work, it is therefore concluded that elder abuse is unbridled. Being a widow, low income earner and a female-reliant elderly, living for a long period of years under nuclear family structure, predispose them to be abused. The emotional or psychological type of abuse is always present regardless of any other abuse types the elderly experienced both in the family and workplace settings.

REFERENCES

- ACL. (1998). National Elder Abuse Incidence Study Retrieved April 04, 2011, from <https://http://www.acl.gov/programs/elder-justice/national-elder-abuse-incidence-study-1998>
- American Psychiatric Association. (2006). *American Psychiatric Association Practice Guidelines for the treatment of psychiatric disorders: compendium 2006*: American Psychiatric Pub.
- APS. (2010). Adult Protective Services (APS) Community and Facility Annual Report: Oregon Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Bancroft, M. (1998). *Gerontologic nursing competencies for care*. Singapore: Lippicott and Williams.
- Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it.
- Ebersole, P., Hess, P., Touhy, T., & Jett, K. (2005a). *Gerontological nursing & healthy aging* (3rd ed.). New York: Willey Publishing incorporated.
- Ebersole, P., Hess, P., Touhy, T., & Jett, K. (2005b). *Gerontological nursing & healthy aging*.
- Fillet, R. (1998). *Changed perspective of gerontological nursing and caring as science* (2nd ed.). Philadelphia: Lippincott.
- Gunawan, J. (2015). Ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Belitung Nursing Journal*, 1(1), 10-11.
- Harrel, J. (2002). *The role of nurses in the changing times of elder care*. Pennsylvania, USA.
- Linton, A. D., Lach, H. W., Matteson, M. A., & McConnell, E. S. (2007). *Matteson & McConnell's gerontological nursing: concepts and practice*: Saunders.
- Litwin, C. (2004). *Better Elder Care: A Nurse's Guide to Caring for Older Adults*. Pennsylvania: Springhouse.
- McCann, J. S., & German, M. S. (2002). *Better Elder Care: A Nurse's Guide to Caring for Older Adults*. Philadelphia: Springhouse.
- McNeill, G. (2004). *Gerontological nursing competencies for care* (5th ed.). New York: Willey publishing incorporated.
- Medina, B. G. (2001). *The Filipino Family* (2nd ed.). Dilliman Quezon City. Philippines University of the Philippines.
- Murdock, B. (1949). *Essentials of gerontological nursing*. Junong, Singapore: earson Education Southe Asia.
- National center for elder abuse. (2003). Elderly as a crucial population group. Retrieved April 4, 2011, from <http://www.careforthem>
- Picariello, G. (1986). A guide for teaching elders. *Geriatric Nursing*, 7(1), 38-39.
- Quinn, M. J. Undue influence and elder abuse: Recognition and intervention strategies (CE). *Geriatric Nursing*, 23(1), 11-17. doi: 10.1067/mgn.2002.122560
- T Castillo, G., Weisblat, A. M., & Villareal, F. R. (1968). The concepts of nuclear and extended family: an exploration of empirical referents. *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, 9, 1.
- US administration for aging. (2004). US administration for aging. Retrieved April 08, 2011, from <http://www.aoa.dhhd.gov/abuse.report.default>
- US department of labor occupational safety. (2002). US department of labor occupational safety. Retrieved April 7, 2011, from <http://samvak.tripod.com/abuse.html>
- Utley, B. (1999). *Issues gerontologic nursing. International Edition*. Singapore: McGraw-Hill Companies Incorporated.
- Zukerman, R. (2003). *Eldercare For Dummies*: Wiley.

Cite this article as: Acob, J.R.U. (2018). Lived experiences of the abused elderly. *Public Health of Indonesia*, 4(1):1-8.